UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

SENATUS ACADEMICUS

Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2022

Present: David Anderson, Joanne Anderson, John Barrow, Alex Brasier, Abbe Brown, Marion Campbell, Delma Childers, Sandi Cleland, Chris Collins, Matthew Collinson, Murilo da Silva Baptista, Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, Greg Gordon, Paul Hallet, Malcolm Harvey, Peter Henderson, Richard Hepworth, Amelia Hunt, Kirsty Kiezebrink, Karl Leydecker, Laura McCann, Kathryn Martin, David McGloin, Colin North, Graeme Paton, Ekaterina Pavlovskaia, Michelle Pinard, Brice Rea, Tom Rist, Thereza Raquel Sales de Aguiar, Diane Skåtun, Matteo Spagnolo, Alan Speight, Scott Styles, Ruth Taylor, Neil Vargesson, Sai Viswanathan, Zeray Yidhego and Haina Zhang.

Apologies: Simon Bains, Jason Bohan, George Boyne, Irene Couzigou, Lynda Erskine, Contanze Hesse, Gareth Jones, Amanda Lee, Gary Macfarlane, Ben Marsden, Iain McEwan, Yukie Tanino.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

18.1   The Senior Vice-Principal opened the meeting, welcoming members of Senate to the meeting on behalf of the Principal who sent his apologies as he was attending a meeting at the Scottish Parliament.

18.2   The Secretary reminded members of procedures: the meeting would be recorded; members were asked to state their name before contributing to discussion and advised to use the chat function to state when they wished to ask a question, members were reminded that the chat itself does not form part of the formal minute, and to remain muted when not speaking.

18.3   Members of the Senate approved the agenda and the meeting proceeded.

REVISED SENATE STANDING ORDERS

19.1   Tracey Slaven, University Secretary, introduced the paper detailed proposed changes to the Senate Standing Orders. Tracey reminded members that following the discussion at Senate in May, Senate had delegated responsibility for review and finalisation to the Senate Business Committee (SBC). Following discussions at SBC and further input from individual Senate members a revised paper was now presented.

19.2   Tracey highlighted that one of the key areas for discussion had been the issue of recording the meetings. She noted that there had been significant debate and consideration of the data protection elements. It had been agreed that while the very detailed minutes continue to be produced, recognising the contribution of individual senators, that it remained appropriate and helpful to have a recording to support that production. A recording also supported transparency of process by senators having reassurance that the recording was there for the Governance Team to check if there were any concerns about the draft minute. It was noted

that in order that the University stays well within the data protection regulations that the recording would not be published or circulated and would be deleted following the approval of the minute at the subsequent Senate.

19.3   There were also some concerns around more minor elements and on clarity around the intent to seek academic input from Senate not being adequately covered in the old standing orders. This is now addressed with a very explicit commitment for those items of academic oversight and policy change to come to Senate for academic input before coming back in a later cycle for approval.

19.4   There is also a proposal to extend the timing of Senate meetings, recognising the richness and substantive nature of the business that Senate needs to address, and to return to the core hours of the university. Tracey recommended Senate discuss and to approve the revisions which were intended to offer increased accessibility in terms of the language used.

19.5   Scott Styles, School of Law, while welcoming the revisions noted that Standing Order four detailed meetings will begin at 1pm however the current meeting had been scheduled for 1.30pm. Scott asked that this be strengthened to make it clear that meetings would begin at 1pm except for in exceptional circumstances.

19.6   Scott also noted that whilst the Standing Orders provide for the SBC to approve the Senate agenda there was no provision to publicise the draft Senate agenda. Scott requested that this is amended and that the draft agenda be published one week before the date chosen for SBC to meet.

19.7   In response Tracey agreed the importance of the University being 'family friendly' in its scheduling of meetings and determined to look at the language used in this regard in the standing orders. She noted, however, that whilst meetings would normally be scheduled for 1pm the current meeting was an exceptional addition and hence it had not been possible to adhere to the normal schedule.

19.8   Tracey also undertook to add a commitment to the Standing Orders that the draft Senate agenda be circulated to members at the time it is made available to the SBC.

19.9   David Anderson, School of Social Science welcomed the clear paper but queried the inclusion of the reference to normal 'core business hours' and how this related to the Flexible Working Policy. Specifically, David queried whether the University had core hours as he was not aware of where these were defined. It was his view that the language used in this context did seem overly restrictive. He pointed out that this was an area which had been discussed many times previously by Senate and, as such, would be detailed in the minutes.

19.10   In addition, David highlighted the references to the Data Protection issues as they relate to the recordings and queried why these would preclude an elected senator requesting a fragment of a recording, and whether this could be made available on a password protected site.

19.11   In response the Senior Vice-Principal reminded members that the Workload Review Group had discussed and determined the core hours, which were agreed as 9.30 a.m. until 4.30 p.m., as

part of the development of the Flexible Working Policy and that these had been published to the whole University. He further noted the need for the University to operate across these core hours and noted that staff need to make their arrangements to make that possible.

19.12   Tracey Slaven, University Secretary, in responding to the points made around the recording, clarified that the Data Protection issue does not relate to making the recording to aid with the production of the minutes, but to any publication of the recording.

19.13   Tracey raised concern with consent being required for any publication of the recording and the impact this might have in terms of such consent acting as a deterrent to individuals volunteering to stand for Senate. The intention is for Senate to be as inclusive as possible, and any video or audio recording being routinely published could be a disincentive to participation.

19.14   Diane Skåtun, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, noted that if the governance team needed a recording in order to produce accurate minutes, then members should be allowed also to hear specific extracts, in order to satisfy themselves the minute is accurate. Diane suggested that members should have the facility to ask for a specific part of the recording knowing that everybody who has spoken has already given consent for that to be released to the person for checking if required.

19.15   Tracey thanked Diane for her helpful clarification and noted that in terms of the distinction between release and publication, her input was especially helpful. Tracey highlighted that in terms of the resolution of any challenge to the minute, she would expect there to be an ongoing conversation between the Governance Team and the individual making that challenge in which details of a specific element of the recording could be shared. This was highlighted as being different from routinely releasing the entire recording. Tracey noted this compromise as helpful.

19.16   Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture noted that the Senate minutes from the 21st of February 2018 noted in minute 52.4 Senate passed a motion 'that recording of the Senate would be made available on the Senate web pages. He further highlighted minute 52.4 which stated that 'Professor Martin had noted that Professor Anderson's question regarding Senate recordings had gone unanswered. Professor Martin asked whether these were available as agreed on the Senate web pages. The clerk, responding, stated that they would be made available within 10 working days along with the draft minutes.' Tom questioned whether or not Senate actually had the power to change the previous decision which had been voted on.

19.17   Matthew Collinson, School of Natural and Computing Sciences, highlighted that the decision from the University's Data Protection Officer, which elected senators had not had the opportunity to scrutinize fully, contrasted with practise elsewhere. Other organisations articulate the legal justification of public task for their senates and other governing bodies and in this context, his view was, that this aligns with the points made already by David Anderson and Diane Skatun. Matthew sought clarification as to why the lawful basis of legitimate public task was not appropriate in the context of making audio recordings of Senate meetings. There is a reasonable expectation that being part of a recording is part of being a member of Senate

19.18   The Senior Vice-Principal suggested that the issues around recordings were not going to resolved as part of the current discussion and that a full report from the Data Protection Officer should be brought to a future meeting. He queried whether Senate could approve the

Standing Orders noting that the issues around recording would be discussed further. The Secretary confirmed this was a possibility.

19.19 Brice Rea, School of Geosciences, noted confusion as to whether or not comments could be provided at this point or whether they needed to be brought to a future meeting but wished to note in the current context that it did not seem appropriate for the Governance Team to have access to the recording but not individual member and that in order to expediate production of the minutes, members should be able to access the recordings.

19.20 The Senior Vice-Principal confirmed that it had been agreed that a vote would be taken on the Standing Orders but excluding the revisions to Standing Order 32 which, pending further discussion, would remain as currently.

19.21 Senate voted 53 in favour, with no one voting against, to approve the Standing Orders excluding Standing Order 32.

REMIT & COMPOSITION OF SENATE SUB-COMMITTEES – SENATE BUSINESS COMMITTEE

20.1 Tracey Slaven, University Secretary, noted the review of remits and composition formed part of the normal annual process, which encourages all committees and groups, to review their remit and report to its parent committee on any changes proposed. Tracey noted the only change proposed related to the composition of elected senators on Senate Business Committee (SBC) to indicate that subject area should also be considered, as well as other equality issues. The main change discussed related to Recommendation 17 from the Senate Effectiveness Review which was to reduce size of the committee which was much larger than comparable committees elsewhere. With this in mind, the SBC recommended that membership is reduced from 19 to 10. Reducing the number of elected members from eight to four, and by reducing the numbers of vice-principals, deans and committee chairs attending from eight to four, enables the same balance between elected and ex officio members within the committee. It was suggested that a smaller group would be more able to have effective discussion on the agenda in what is a relatively short time frame available to that meeting. Senate Business Committee recommended to Senate to endorse the paper as presented.

20.2 Tom Rist, School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, sought clarification of what difficulties were being encountered by the Committee and therefore what problems the changes were seeking to solve.

20.3 The Senior Vice-Principal confirmed that the changes were being proposed in response to the recommendations of the Effectiveness Review. The Review had recommended streamlining the Committee as the amount of time being taken up by such a large committee for so many staff was not an efficient use of time.

20.4 Diane Skåtun, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition queried whether the relative balance of elected to ex officio members on SBC reflects the balance on Senate.

20.5 Tracey confirmed that it does not, but also confirmed that the balance would be unchanged from the current balance. The proposed composition would be a slimmed-down version of the current Committee.

20.6 David Anderson, School of Social Science, suggested that as the committee does not reflect the proportions of Senate currently, maybe some further elected senators should be added to the committee.

20.7 The Senior Vice-Principal noted that he would not object to a further elected member. He further noted that the Committee is intended to be representative: it would have four elected senators and a Senate assessor. The four elected senators will be drawn from across the groupings that we have in order to ensure that Senate is fully represented. He highlighted to keep adding members would run contrary to the Effectiveness Review recommendation to reduce the size of the Committee.

20.8 Neil Vargesson, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition confirmed that as a member of SBC it can take significant time to reach decisions in the Committee and that streamlining the membership is sensible. He further noted the difficulties which have occurred when seeking volunteers from amongst elected members to sit on the Committee and reminded members of the need to volunteer when members are sought.

20.9 The Senior Vice-Principal confirmed that no further ex officio Senate members would be added and that he would be content with there being five elected members. He noted that the number of members would be determined by the number of volunteers. If elected members did not volunteer the membership would remain at four.

REMIT & COMPOSITION OF SENATE SUB-COMMITTEES – UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COMMITTEE

21.1 Marion Campbell, Vice-Principal (Research) introduced the proposed changes to the University Research Committee (formerly Research Policy Committee). Marion highlighted that the changes were relatively minor relating to the title of the Committee and reporting lines. No other changes were proposed.

21.2 Murilo da Silva Baptista, School of Natural and Computing Sciences queried whether there was a requirement to be a professor to be on the committee and whether there were elected senators on the Committee.

21.3 Marion confirmed that many members were professors but that this was determined by the School appointments of Directors of Research. Marion further confirmed that elected senators are not part of the committee as it does a lot of the early business before items are brought to Senate for comment. The committee does the technical work behind policies and then takes to for Senate discussion. It would duplicate work for Senate if they were involved at the Committee stage also.

21.4 Brice Rea, School of Geosciences, confirmed that as a member of the Committee and an elected member of Senate he did not feel that elected members were also needed on the Committee as anything substantive would be brought to Senate in a refined form for discussion and/or approval.

21.5 The Senior Vice-Principal confirmed with Senate that given the discussion they were content to approve the changes. No objections were raised.

**REMIT & COMPOSITION OF SENATE SUB-COMMITTEES –
UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEES**

22.1   Tracey Slaven, University Secretary introduced the paper which detailed the revised University Education Committee (UEC) remit. Tracey reminded Senate that discussion had been begun at Senate in May 2022, but that there had been insufficient time at the meeting to conclude discussion

22.2   Tracey reminded Senate that the key items discussed at the May 2022 meeting included the temporary continuation of Senate representatives on the Education committee to reflect the transition from the previous position to the UEC becoming a full committee of Senate with the same relationship previously discussed in relation to the Research Committee. The very positive change of the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) moving to be a direct subcommittee of Senate had also been welcomed at the May meeting.

22.3   Tracey noted that the other key area of discussion related to the chairing of UEC and QAC, with the Senate taking a formal vote to propose that the chairs of those two committees were kept separate, with an articulation of some concern of conflict of interest.

22.4   Tracey highlighted that the revised paper reflected some developments since the discussion in May, and that the Senior Management Team (SMT) had agreed the reintroduction of the role of Dean for Quality Assurance in addition to the investment being made in a professional role as a Head of Quality. Given that change, two options for the chairing of UEC and QAC were presented in the paper.

22.5   Tracey set out the two options with option A reflecting the will of Senate in the May meeting with the proposal that the Dean of Quality assurance chairs QAC with the subsidiary group being chaired by the Head of quality. The alternative, option B, was presented, with the Vice-Principal (Education) chairing QAC and the subgroup being chaired by the Dean for Quality Assurance. Tracey reminded Senate of the importance of separation of roles between the two direct subcommittees of Senate and noted that previously items from QAC came via UEC but under the new structure both UEC and QAC would report to Senate directly. This, together with the different committee compositions, provides sufficient separation of duties between the two committee roles and chairs in governance terms.

22.6   Tracey also highlighted that the change to the composition of UEC to now include representation of all schools as well as QAC having all schools represented, resulted in both committees have full school representation and being direct subcommittees of Senate. The revised structure has reduced the number of layers

22.7   Brice Rea, School of Geosciences commented that the paper might be considered to be leading to the view that option A is less desirable than option B. He noted that the potential conflict of interest with the Vice-Principal (Education) chairing both committees was not explored fully in the paper and sought clarity on why it was not a conflict of interest for the Vice-Principal to chair both Committees.

22.8   Tracey confirmed that Quality Assurance and Education provision were both explicit components of the Vice-Principal (Education) portfolio and hence the role required oversight of both activities.

22.9 The responsibilities of UEC and QAC are significantly different. Whilst there was connectivity, one should not be subsidiary to the other. Tracey noted that this was what the new structure was attempting to address. The proposed new structure, with QAC reporting directly to Senate, avoided that conflict of interest because it is the committee as a whole which would be reporting under a chairmanship rather than an individual presenting a view. The concern expressed previously was that there might be lack of transparency when issues flowed from QAC, through UEC and only thence to Senate. In addition, being a joint committee, had meant there was even less direct of a direct line to Senate.

22.10 Diane Skåtun, School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition asked whether the academic policy and regulations group was new and asked why it had it not existed under QAC previously. Diane noted her view that option A seemed preferable as keeping two different chairs to two very important Committees kept the independence. In addition, she commented that she was not content to have the Head of Quality chairing the academic policy and regulations group

22.11 In response Tracey confirmed that the Academic Policy and Regulations Group was an articulation of work that happened previously but now was formalised into a Group. She stressed that this was not a Committee but a Group and as such would not have delegated authority. Such a group carried out work on behalf of its parent committee, but the authority remained with the parent committee. Tracey further stressed that a professional Head of Quality would possess an appropriate skill set to develop technical aspects of the role.

22.12 Following confirmation that there were no further contributions, the Senior Vice-Principal proposed that Senate should vote on the matter.

22.13 The Secretary confirmed that the initial vote in front of Senate was to decide between option A or option B for the chairing of the quality assurance committees. Senate voted 26 in favour of option A and 19 in favour of option B resulting in option A being selected.

22.14 Murilo da Siva Baptista, School of Natural and Computing Sciences queried why it was appropriate for there to Be members Senate in the composition of the Education Committees but not the Research Committees

22.15 The Secretary clarified the proposed structures reflected the historic position which had included Senate representation on the Education Committee. It had been agreed at Senate in May that representation would be retained for a transitional period to ensure that Senate was content that everything necessary was being brought to it for discussion

22.16 Following agreement from Senate that a further vote on the education committee structures was not required, it was agreed that the full package of Education Committee structures was approved, and the meeting closed.